

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 338

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TAGS: PINS

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT BEATS TACTICAL RETREAT

REF: MANILA 335

SUMMARY: GOP GIVES SIGNS OF EASING OFF ITS RATHER HEAVY
HANDED EFFORTS TO CONTROL LIBERAL ELEMENTS OF CHURCH.
RELAXATION APPARENTLY RELATED TO DESIRE TO PRESENT GOOD
IMAGE DURING SERIES OF HIGH LEVEL VISITS SCHEDULED NEXT
FEW MONTHS. IT MAY DISARM CRITICS ABROAD AND HELP AVOID
CONFRONTATION AT BISHOPS' CONFERENCE LATE JANUARY. BUT
WE VIEW RELAXATION AS A TACTICAL MEASURE ONLY. NEITHER
GOP NOR CHURCH GIVE ANY SIGNS OF REACHING UNDERSTANDING
ON SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND EVEN IF TACTICAL RETREAT BRINGS
TEMPORARY LULL WE WOULD EXPECT TWO ENTITIES WILL RETURN
TO CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY.

1. AT MOMENT WHEN GOP IS BENDING EVERY EFFORT TO IMPRESS
SERIES OF HIGH LEVEL VISITORS (E.G. TANAKA, LEE KUAN YEW,
ETC.) THAT PRESIDENT FIRMLY IS IN THE SADDLE, IT APPEARS
TO HAVE EASED OFF TEMPORARILY ON CONFRONTATION COURSE WITH
THE CHURCH. INDICATIONS OF REVERSAL OF POSITION ON GERLOCK
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(SEE REFTTEL), RELEASE OF FATHER CULLEN AND FROM MANILA RESTRIC-

TION AND ANNOUNCEMENT IN JAN 11 PRESS THAT GOVERNMENT WILL NOT PROSECUTE NON-VOTERS INCLUDING JEHOVA WITNESSES, ARE ALL INDICATIONS OF THIS CHANGE IN POLICY. RELAXATION OF PRESSURE POSSIBLY SIGNED BY GOVERNMENT'S DIRECTION TO ITS SECURITY FORCES LATE NOVEMBER TO DELETE CLERGY FROM ITS PRIORITY TARGET LIST (FULL MEANING OF DECISION NOT CLEAR BUT CERTAINLY RELATED TO ADVERSE PUBLICITY TO GOP ARREST PROCEDURES).

2. RELAXATION OF PRESSURE IS WISE TACTICAL MOVE DURING THIS SENSITIVE PERIOD BECAUSE OF HIGH VISIBILITY THAT GOP WILL BE SUBJECTED TO DURING SERIES OF STATE VISITS PROJECTED DURING NEXT FEW MONTHS BY ACCOMPANYING PRESS. IT ALSO VERY SENSIBLE TACTICAL MOVE IN VIEW OF THE FORTHCOMING BISHOPS' CONFERENCE SCHEDULED FOR JAN 21-25. MAJOR RELIGIOUS ORDERS HEADED BY JESUITS HAVE BEEN BUILDING UP TO A CONFRONTATION WITH GOVERNMENT AT THE CONFERENCE AND HAD IN PART INTENDED TO REST THEIR CASE ON GOVERNMENT'S ABUSE OF FATHER GERLOCK. TIMING OF GERLOCK'S THIRD AND PROBABLY FINAL HEARING (ASSUMING HE IS RELEASED) ON JAN 22, DURING BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, WILL HELP DEFUSE ANTICIPATION CONFRONTATION AND MAY STRENGTHEN THE HANDS OF CONSERVATIVES WHO ARE NO DOUBT UNDER PRESSURES FROM THE GOP TO ATTEMPT TO SECURE NON-CONTENTIOUS CONCLUSION TO THE CONFERENCE.

3. GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ACUTELY SENSITIVE TO UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY THAT IT HAS EARNED ABROAD BY ITS CLAMP DOWN ON LIBERAL REPRESENTATIVES OF CHURCH. ALTHOUGH GOP HAS FELT COMPELLED TO RESPOND TO DOMESTIC PRIORITIES FIRST, IT RECOGNIZES THAT FOR EVERY FOREIGN PRIEST DETAINED OR DEPORTED IT EARNS CONDEMNATION OF MANY MORE IN U.S. PARTICULARLY, BUT IN OTHER AREAS INCLUDING ROME, WHERE CHURCH SOCIAL ACTION IS WELL REGARDED. EASING UP OF PRESSURES ON CHURCH, THEREFORE, PRESUMABLY ALSO INTENDED TO DISARM CRITICS ABROAD.

4. ALTHOUGH RELAXATION OF CONFRONTATION PRESSURES WITH THE CHURCH AT THIS TIME IS USEFUL TACTICAL PLOY, WE SEE NO INDICATION YET THAT GOVERNMENT HAS DEVELOPED MORE SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE LIBERAL ELEMENTS OF CHURCH AND THEIR ZEALOUS PURSUIT OF "UNIVERSAL JUSTICE." GOVERNMENT'S ARM TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEAL WITH THE CHURCH HAS BEEN RESTRICTED ESSENTIALLY TO MILITARY SIDE, HEADED BY DEFENSE SECRETARY ENRILE AND HOME DEFENSE GENERAL PECACHE. FLAVOR OF MEETINGS HAS BEEN MARKED NOT ONLY BY ACRIMONY BUT EVIDENTLY SINCERE BELIEF ON MILITARY'S PART THAT LIBERAL CHURCH (CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT) CONCERN FOR ITS FLOCK OUTSIDE OF LITURGICAL CONFINES IS FREQUENTLY HOSTILE AND OFTEN DOWNRIGHT SUBVERSIVE. EVEN IF TWO PARTIES MADE EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER,

WE WOULD EXPECT THAT LIBERAL CHURCH'S INSISTENCE THAT IT
HAD INDEPENDENT RIGHT TO PROMOTE INTERESTS OF PARISHIONERS
IN SECULAR MATTERS POSES ALMOST INSUPERABLE PROBLEM FOR
CONTROLLED SOCIETY. WHILE TACTICAL RELAXATION MAY HELP
GOVERNMENT GET THROUGH NEXT FEW MONTHS WITHOUT EMBARRASSING
CONFLICT WITH LIBERAL CHURCH, IT IS NOT LONG RUN SOLUTION.
IF LIBERAL ELEMENTS CONTINUE THEIR PURSUIT OF "UNIVERSAL
JUSTICE" IN CONFLICT WITH GOVERNMENT, AS WE EXPECT THEY
WILL, GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO CONFRONT THEM AGAIN.
SULLIVAN

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